

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

#290

ALBERT LUCO FICKEL

USS *PENNSYLVANIA*, SURVIVOR

**INTERVIEWED ON
DECEMBER 6, 1998
BY DANIEL MARTINEZ**

TRANSCRIBED BY:

CARA KIMURA

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**USS *ARIZONA* MEMORIAL
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION**

Daniel Martinez (DM): The following oral history interview was conducted by Daniel Martinez, historian for the National Park Service at the USS *Arizona* Memorial. It was taped at the Imperial Palace Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada on December 6, 1998 at approximately 7:30 in the evening. The person being interviewed is Albert Fickel. He was aboard the USS *Pennsylvania* on December 7, 1941. Do you liked to be called Al or Albert?

Albert Fickel (AF): Al is fine.

DM: Al, for the record, would you please state your full name?

AF: My full name is Albert Luco Fickel.

DM: And your place of birth?

AF: Lueders, Jones County, Texas.

DM: And the date you were born?

AF: December the eighth, 1920.

DM: And can you tell me, in 1941, what did you consider as your hometown?

AF: Lueders, Texas.

DM: Lueders, Texas. And what part of Texas is that located in?

AF: That's in west Texas. It's thirty-two miles north of Abilene, Texas.

DM: Now, when you were growing up, how many kids were in the family?

AF: Until I was seven and a half years old, I was the only one. But I had a brother that's seven and a half years younger than I am.

DM: So there was two sons in that family?

AF: Two sons.

DM: What'd your dad do?

AF: My dad was a rock mason in—well, he had a number of jobs. He was a rock mason and he tried at ranching, which he went broke at. Then he came back then and he went to work in the refineries, in the oil refineries, which was a going thing in Texas at that time.

DM: And your mother?

AF: My mother was a housewife.

DM: So she helped raise both boys.

AF: She was a housewife and she was born in Wharton County, Texas.

DM: Now, your family went through the Great Depression?

AF: My family did go through the Great Depression.

DM: And the Dust Bowl.

AF: And the thing of it is, this is one of the things that aggravates me more than anything else about the people saying they haven't got anything to eat. I lived on beans and sow belly and cornbread and water biscuits. And I'm still here at seventy-eight, so it must've been good for me.

DM: It must've been. But those times were tough, but those were the times, right?

AF: Yeah, those was the times. You made ten cents an hour. And the reason that you're going to ask my why I joined the navy. I'll tell you exactly why I joined the navy. The only thing that was available in west Texas that you could do was work in the cotton fields, or work in the feed fields and so forth. And the going wages at that time was ten cents an hour and you furnished your own food.

DM: When did you join the navy?

AF: I joined the navy the sixth day of September 1939.

DM: And how come the navy instead of the other branches of service?

AF: Well, I guess we had a couple guys that was out of the navy that had come home on leave and I liked the way that uniform looked and that cocky white hat, so I figured that was ought to be my cup of tea, you know.

DM: Texas—unless you get down to Galveston, you don't have much water in Texas.

AF: Yeah, but I didn't have any transportation down there to that gulf either. So I went to the gulf in 1926.

DM: Uh-huh.

AF: I went to the gulf again in 1932 and that was the last time I saw salt water until I joined the navy.

DM: Now, did they ship you off to San Diego after you got sworn in?

AF: They shipped me from Dallas to San Diego and we had seven weeks of boot camp.

DM: How was that?

AF: What?

DM: How was the boot camp?

AF: Tough. Tough.

DM: What was the toughest thing about it for you?

AF: I really didn't have anything that's really tough because I was used to walking. And the guys that wasn't used to walking on that tarmac is the ones that really suffered. I didn't suffer from it because everywhere I went in west Texas, I walked or run.

DM: Oh, okay. So your feet were pretty broke in.

AF: Yeah.

DM: But you said it was tough. Did you learn how to swim? Did you know how to swim?

AF: I knew how to swim.

DM: Okay.

AF: In fact, that was one of the things they did. They took us to the swimming pool. They said, "Dive in on this end."

I dive in on this end and swim to the other end, swim out. And they says, "You're qualified."

So boot camp was a cinch as far as I was concerned.

DM: How was the chow?

AF: The chow was good. The best food I ever ate. The first meal I ever had in the navy was beans and cornbread on a Sunday morning.

DM: But it was damn good, right.

AF: Yeah. (Chuckles)

DM: Coming out of—boot camp is a way that disciplines you, trains you and they also find out what you might be good at. What did the navy think you were going to be good at?

AF: The navy didn't ask you what you was going to be good at, let me tell you.

DM: Right.

AF: When you went aboard ship, you went aboard ship that you could more or less figure you was going to be in the deck force for a year.

DM: As an apprentice seaman?

AF: As an apprentice seaman and a seaman second, 'cause you made seaman second after six months. But everybody, as far as I know, unless they was a whiz, they went into the navy, they went into deck force.

DM: Right.

AF: All of the guys that went to company with me went to deck force.

DM: Now, what was your—when you come out of boot camp, you know you're going to be assigned to a ship. Did you know what ship you were being assigned, or did they...

AF: Oh, yes. They give us a list of ships that was available, that they needed crewmembers on and we could put in for it. But they didn't guarantee you was going to get that.

DM: Now, what did you put in for?

AF: I put in for the USS *Pennsylvania*.

DM: You wanted to be aboard a battleship.

AF: I wanted to, that's the biggest thing afloat. That's what I wanted.

DM: Now, why did you want to be on the biggest thing afloat?

AF: Hell, I come from the biggest state in the United States! Everything was big in Texas. I wanted something big in the navy!

DM: And you got her.

AF: Yeah.

DM: Were you prepared for the spit and polish of the battleship or...

AF: Yes. It wasn't any problem. I come from a very disciplined family. My mother didn't put up with any...

DM: Backtalk or...

AF: ...backtalk, anything from me, and if I did backtalk, my father took it up from there. And this business of these kids saying that their father has to be the big brother and all this, that's for the birds. I was scared to death of my daddy. He gave me five lickings in my life and I remember them to the day, to this very day, I remember 'em. But I didn't give him any backtalk. And what he said, as long as I put my feet under his table and lived in his house, I did what he told me to do.

DM: Aboard the *Pennsylvania*, when you first saw her, what did you think of her?

AF: The biggest, prettiest thing I ever see.

DM: Now, in those days, when you went aboard ship, you brought everything with you—your hammock, your...

AF: A 125 pounds of it.

DM: Is that right?

AF: And you pick it up in that forty-foot motor launch and you carry it up that gangway and you swore to god that was the heaviest thing you ever picked up.

DM: And then when you went aboard ship, you made sure you dropped it and saluted the flag and all of that.

AF: You set it down and that's when they come, the boatswain mates come out and they says we've got so many people. So, okay, these people go to fourth division. These goes to third division. These to the fifth, the sixth division. And the first class boatswain mate took us over and took us to our quarters

where we would, our berthing quarters and says this is where you're at. The first year I spent in the navy, I slept in a hammock.

DM: What's it like sleeping in a hammock?

AF: Not bad after you get used to it.

DM: What's the worst part about getting used to it?

AF: The worst part of getting used to it is its very confining. But the thing of it is, after you learn how to sleep in the hammock, what you do, you put two sticks in each end of it. That opens it up and then you can sleep with one leg out from under it and one leg hanging over the side and you never fall out of it. Because if you fall out on them steel decks, I mean that really puts a lump on your head, you know.

But you was asking whether I had, I went in the navy as a trade. No, I didn't because they didn't offer us any trades. One of the things that always came to my mind, old Admiral Richardson. He was the Commander-in-Chief of the Pacific Fleet and he rode the *Pennsylvania*. And every morning, he'd come out in his house shoes and his robe and he'd walk up and down the quarterdeck on the starboard side of the battleship. That was my cleaning station and this guy by the name of Emerson, well he was back there in the back, shining bright work and I told Emerson, I said, "You know," I said, "I joined the navy to learn a trade. And this is a hell of a way to learn a trade, you know."

And I didn't know old Admiral Richardson was anywhere in hearing distance. And he says, "Son,"—and when he said, "Son," I looked up and saw him and I come to a ramrod stiffness. And he said, "Oh, relax." He says, "One thing I want to tell you," he said, "I just heard your remark you made." He said, "We all started at the bottom." And he says, "You can get as much out of the navy as you put in it."

And I feel like that that's what I did. I went from apprentice seaman aboard the USS *Pennsylvania* to a chief petty officer in four and a half years.

DM: That's quite a feat.

AF: Well, I was the youngest chief machinist mate in the navy.

DM: How old were you when you went aboard ship?

AF: I was eighteen. I went aboard ship in October in 1939 and I was nineteen years old the eighth of December of 1939.

DM: It sounds—Admiral Richardson is a really interesting individual as he plays in the Pearl Harbor story and he in fact wrote his memoirs called, *On the Treadmill [to Pearl Harbor]*...

AF: I've got a book of it.

DM: And Admiral Richardson was very, very concerned about the fleet being out in Hawaii and being vulnerable.

AF: It was a trap.

DM: And, yeah, he, in fact, he called it “a goddamn mousetrap.”

AF: Yeah, that's what he called it, “a goddamn mousetrap.” There's one way in, one way out. And you closed that jug up and I use that when I speak. I talk to a lot of kids in the schools back at home. And this is one of things that I explain to 'em. Pearl Harbor is one of the most beautiful harbors in the world. I mean, it's a safe harbor, but it is still a trap, even to this day. I mean, if an enemy wanted to sink a big ship in that, it'd be hell to get your fleet out of that place.

DM: Right. Of course, Admiral Richardson also made his comments public and for that he was relieved.

AF: Mm-hm.

DM: And then Admiral Kimmel came aboard and you were aboard when Admiral Kimmel came on.

AF: I was there.

DM: What kind of guy was Admiral Kimmel, from a seaman's point of view? I know that you're not in on the big...

AF: I was already in engineering department when he came.

DM: Never saw him?

AF: Oh, I seen him when he come aboard.

DM: Yeah.

AF: I mean, when he'd drive up the gangway and they'd bring him aboard, when we was going to sea. But as far as having any close contact with him, I was already out of the deck force, so I didn't have too much to do with.

DM: Did you participate in any sports as a seaman on board, because I know sports...

AF: Softball.

DM: Softball.

AF: I played softball every chance we got.

DM: Yeah? And you played against other ships, didn't you?

AF: Yeah, we played against the divisions and then if you was the champion of them, then you played against the champions of the other ships.

DM: Now, how'd you guys do?

AF: Well, we held our own.

DM: Yeah?

AF: You know the *Pennsylvania* on the night before the attack on December the seventh...

DM: Right.

AF: ...they had the battle of the bands...

DM: Right.

AF: ...at, what is it...

DM: At Bloch Arena?

AF: Tin Roof? The Tin Roof? Wasn't that what they used to call it?

DM: Well, it's Bloch Arena.

AF: Bloch Arena.

DM: Right.

AF: That Bloch Arena.

DM: It actually was called the Battle of Music.

AF: The Battle of the Music and it was against the *Arizona* and the *Pennsylvania*. That was the finalists and the *Arizona* won. I mean the *Pennsylvania* won and all of those musicians was sent back to the ship or went back to the ship and they was given permission to sleep in on December the seventh. And they're still sleeping in.

DM: All right. Right.

AF: I've got...

DM: Yeah, and as you know, all of the ships went to general quarters and one of the horrifying sidebars to the *Arizona*'s band is they got, they were sleeping in, but they went to their general quarters, but their general quarters were handlers in the forward magazines.

AF: Mm-hm. Most of them are still on there.

DM: Yeah, they got...well, you know what happened to 'em when the magazines...

AF: See, when that war started, the morning that they started, I was on watch. I had the four to eight watch in number three engine room. I had the cold iron watch and we was in dry dock there.

DM: What's a cold iron watch?

AF: The cold iron watch just means that you don't have any boilers running aboard ship.

DM: Uh-huh.

AF: And you don't have any generators running. You're taking all of your power from the beach.

DM: Right.

AF: And so you've got to have a watch to make sure that they don't overload as far as electrical resistance are concerned.

DM: Right.

AF: So that was what, that was my duties and I had that from four to eight in the morning until eight o'clock that morning.

DM: How many decks were you down?

AF: About five decks.

DM: Five decks down. So you're pretty low in the ship.

AF: Well, it was right down on the keel block, practically.

DM: Right.

AF: The only thing in between us and the bottom is your double...

DM: Double hull.

AF: ...double bottoms.

DM: Yeah. On the night of December 6, and this night—that was fifty-seven years ago—did you have Cinderella liberty at all, or were you on watch aboard ship, that Saturday, before the attack?

AF: Well I had three days' leave coming. It started on Sunday morning at eight o'clock, to celebrate my twenty-first birthday. And...

DM: When was your birthday going to be?

AF: On the eighth of December.

DM: December 8.

AF: That was on a Sunday, my birthday was on a Monday and you know as well as I do that it was impossible to get overnight liberty for white hats in Honolulu in the forties and '41 because there were 77,000 enlisted personnel aboard that ship, I mean aboard that island.

DM: Right.

AF: Those are the ones that the Pearl Harbor survivors that are taken from to this day.

DM: Right.

AF: So to finagle three days' leave, it took a lot of finagling and I had to more or less get down on my knees and beg to get that.

DM: Now what were you going to do with that leave, had it happened?

AF: In Honolulu in 1941, it was impossible, if you was underage, to buy a drink across the bar. You went to jail if they caught you and those big Marines and those MP's walked those streets day in, day out. Okay. Now I don't know whether you want this on tape or not.

DM: Just tell me the story. It's all right. It's part of history.

AF: But they had cathouses, houses of prostitution.

DM: Right on River Street.

AF: All up and down River Street and Hotel Street.

DM: Uh-huh.

AF: My favorite one was the New Senator.

DM: I have some matchbooks from there.

AF: Okay. It's right across the street from the deer joint and Wo Fat's and some other places.

DM: Yeah.

AF: I was more or less adopted by that madam that run that place. And I used to go back in her quarters and drink beer back there. I paid for the beer. She'd buy it and put it in her refrigerator and I could sit back there and drink it. And there was one particular gal that worked up there and—of course a lot of people don't know this, but the biggest women of the women that worked in those cathouses was secretaries and stenographers and clerks and so forth, and came to the United, came to the islands in the summertime to make money and make a lot of money.

So consequently she told me, she says, "You know," she says, "Whitey,"—they used to call me Whitey because my hair was real blonde. She says, "How old are you?"

I said, "I'll be twenty-one years old the eighth day of December."

She said, “I’ll tell you what I’m going to do.” She said, “I like you.”

And she used to carry me out to Waikiki Beach to surfboard many, many times. See, she had her own car out there.

DM: Uh-huh.

AF: She says, “I tell you what I’m going to do.” She said, “I’ve got a cabana over at,”—what’s the air station over there?

DM: Kaneohe Bay?

AF: Kaneohe Bay. It’s over there, close to Kaneohe Base. She says, “And I’m going to give you that little redheaded gal and my car and she’s going to drive the car.” And she said, “You use my cabana over there and celebrate your—if you can get three days’ leave.”

So this is the things that I took back aboard ship to my chief engineer and told him. I said, “I’ve got a place to live and a place to stay. I don’t have to be sleeping on the streets or in the beach.”

He said, “Okay.” He said, “But if you get picked up,” he says, “it’s going to be your butt!”

So anyway, she was [*parked*] out there on December the seventh at that front gate, waiting for me to come out and I was supposed to get off at eight o’clock. The Japanese attacked and they machined gun that car and it was an ’88 Oldsmobile. Every bullet that went into that car went in right behind the front seat. That little old gal was sitting in the front seat. It went through that thing. It looked like a sea of ‘em. I saw the car later on. Every one of the bullets went through there but not one of ‘em scratched her or tore up that car where it wouldn’t run. She drove it back to Honolulu. And it was about eight days, ‘cause we was in dry dock. We got in on there on Friday and we’d already [*tore*] out main, steam lines and everything because we had a lot of leaks and everything. So it was about eight days before I got downtown to thank her for what the things had happened and for what she had done. And the first thing when I walked up them stairs and walked in

that cathouse, that blonde, that red-headed gal, she says, “You little white-headed son-of-a-bitch, you likely got me killed!”

DM: (Laughs)

AF: So that’s always been—I mean it’s no secret. My wife knows all my bad habits and everything else. So but after that, shortly after that, I think the twenty-fifth of December or twenty-fourth of December, which. We departed for the West Coast and I never did get to see those people after that. But I’ll tell you something, I know a lot of people in that island that I’ve met at the cathouses that still lives there. And they’re wives and they’ve got kids and grandkids and everything else.

DM: Boy, if you wrote your tell-all book, it might be a—you might end up on Jerry Springer.

AF: Yeah, I know it.

DM: You must’ve been mad as hell at the Japanese for messing up your weekend.

AF: For a long time, I was really perturbed about the Japanese.

DM: How’d you get over that?

AF: I spent off and on twelve years in Japan and I met a lot of good people over there. And more or less, the way that they was taught, anybody that surrendered, anybody that give up, they was lower than a snake’s belly. So this, I think this is one of the reasons why they was so hard on their prisoners-of-war, because most of the people that I met over in Japan and I’ve sat and talked to admirals and captains and everything else. And of course they was...

DM: They were in the Japanese Navy?

AF: Yeah, they was in the Japanese Navy. Now, I don’t know this to be a fact, but they said that the Japanese Navy, a lot of their commanding officers and everything had served in the United States Navy, as mess cooks, I mean as

mess attendants, because they passed themselves off as Filipinos. Now I don't know that to be a fact, but.

DM: Well, I'm not sure about that. I do know that they had a naval academy that was modeled after Annapolis.

AF: Oh yeah, yeah. And Yamamoto, he went to school in...

DM: Harvard.

AF: ...at Harvard. And I think that, it seemed to me like I heard somewhere or not, I don't know whether it's true or not, that he actually studied a lot of the naval business as far as...

DM: Oh yeah, he was a student and he admired the American navy.

AF: Yeah.

DM: But getting back to you, you're one of—there have been several survivors that have gone through this transition. So what you're telling me is that bitterness and hatred that you had during the war, which was a necessary part I suppose of fighting the war, that was in your heart, that was transformed when you met the people.

AF: That's right. I'll tell you what, I feel, when I was first started going over there in '46, I was over there in '46, '47, '48, '49, practically every year up 'til 1957. I felt safer walking down the dark streets in Japan than I do in my own country. Now that's an awful thing to say, but I did. I felt very safe. And up until the time that those people became Americanized, they didn't even have any locks on their doors. You could go to any place and knock on the door and say, "Mama-san, Papa-san, I need help to get this, this, this," and they'd be more than glad to take you there.

DM: That's interesting. I'd like to just take you back to that day, December 7, and you were down there. You said you had the, you were on this cold watch, I guess it was.

AF: Cold...

DM: Cold iron watch.

AF: Cold iron. That's power watch. And cold iron and power watch.

DM: When did you—you were going to just get off. Supposed to have...

AF: What I tell you what I had in mind.

DM: Okay.

AF: I don't know whether you remember it or not or whether somebody else has said it, but at that time they was clearing that harbor behind Ford Island. And that was full of coral heads.

DM: Right.

AF: So what they would do on the weekends, they would dynamite that coral.

DM: Right.

AF: And on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday and Saturday—no, Saturday—but during the week, they used those big core drills to pump all that stuff out of the harbor, to...

DM: Dredge it.

AF: ...to deepen that harbor. And that's what I thought was going on. There's a guy by the name of Ace Miles. I used to call him Twin Screws because he had a propeller tattooed on each cheek of his butt. And we called him Twin Screws and you could always tell that Twin Screws when he was washing clothes because them propellers was running, you know, as he scrubbed his clothes. But he was my relief that morning and he came down, when he came down the engine room, he said, "Hey, Al," he said, "you're not going on leave today because they've got planes up there with big meatballs." And he says, "Ford Island is on fire." And he said, "Part of our battleships are already sinking."

‘Cause he stopped up there and saw all this and I’m sitting down there waiting for him to come to get, relieve me.

DM: So you heard these kind of vibrations going on or maybe explosions and you thought it was a coral head...

AF: Not too much. Not too much.

DM: Did you think this guy was serious or...

AF: Well, I did not, I wanted to go see for myself. So what I did, I left the engine room, I went to topside and I saw what was going on and by that time they was getting—I can’t remember whether they had sounded general quarters or not, because if they had sounded general quarters, I’d have went to my battle station. I didn’t. I went to topside. And the *Oklahoma* was already having a list on it. Ford Island was already on fire. So I left there and I went back to the number one engine room ‘cause I was a phone talker—that was my battle station, in number one engine room. And I had just cleared the third deck going down in the engine room when that bomb hit the *Pennsylvania*. And I think if I remember correctly, it killed twenty-six Marines on there. [*Six Marines were killed in action aboard USS Pennsylvania on 7 DEC 1941*]

DM: Now, if you don’t mind, when you went up to the deck of the vessel, was that on the quarterdeck?

AF: That’s on the quarterdeck, yeah.

DM: And so you went aft—did you go aft a little to look or could you get a good view from where you were standing?

AF: What, I had to go topside.

DM: Right.

AF: And then go back down to the engine room, yeah.

DM: When you looked out there and you saw all of this happening to Battleship Row and Ford Island...

AF: It left you speechless because we had been taught and drilled that we were the best, that we had nothing to fear from nobody because we were the best. And that there was no one that would be, that would attack us. And this was the feeling everybody had, as far as...

DM: And you looked out across that harbor and then you realized what?

AF: You're numb. You're really numb. I really—when I look back on it now, these days, years later, I really don't know what I thought. You're left speechless. Then you go down to the engine room, you dog down that engine room and everything that you hear is what you get over the phone and then of course it was coming to me. I passed the word on to the chief engineer. But there's nothing—what can you do when you're sitting down there in the dry dock? And of course the guns was going off. By that time those five-inch twenty-fives was firing at the Japanese planes, but you're just like being in a cellar. You don't know what's going on.

DM: Were you ever scared during that time?

AF: Hell, I was scared for four years.

DM: During the war?

AF: Yeah. The *Pennsylvania* was hit the first day of the war in dry dock, in Ten-Ten dry dock. It was torpedoed the last day of the war, in Okinawa. I had just walked out of that—I had the duty on the last day of the war. I had just walked out of the shaft alley, to make sure that all our watertight doors was closed and had gone up forward to the chief's quarters and had laid down my bunk when that torpedo hit that, hit the ship. And we liked to sunk her.

DM: So the last day, almost last day of the war, huh?

AF: Yeah.

DM: Were going to stop the tape. We're going to change tapes and then we'll go on for about, oh, five, ten minutes. But I would like you to think while he's doing that.

AF: Yeah.

END OF TAPE #14

TAPE #15

DM: After the attack was all over, when did you get out of that station down below?

AF: When did I get what?

DM: When the attack was over, after the two hours, did they keep you down there most of the day, or did you get topside again?

AF: Oh, we went back to topside where we could see what was going on and the thing of it was, it was all over with, I don't think, around about 10:30, somewhere along through there, that we finally up there to see what was going on.

DM: How bad was the ship damaged?

AF: It had pretty good size hole in it. Five hundred pound bomb, you know, that makes a pretty good—the indentation in that armored deck that protected the engineering department was still there the day that I left it in 1946.

DM: Oh, it was still there, huh?

AF: Yeah.

DM: Now, forward were two destroyers, the *Cassin* and *Downes*. Did you get a look at them?

AF: Yeah. Mostly they was completely wrecks. And of course that dry dock—see, they flooded the dry dock to keep from busting the keel on the ship, when they was firing on the guns.

DM: Oh, that was the reason?

AF: Yeah, that's the reason why they fired. But they couldn't put too much water in there because see, we had part of the stern—no, I take it back, they did. They brought it up just to the point where it wouldn't float, but it still stayed on the keel blocks.

DM: But just high enough.

AF: Yeah.

DM: So a lot of people don't realize that, the ship in dry dock couldn't fire because that metal won't, that metal will snap.

AF: It'll snap, yeah. The concussion, or the vibration would've snapped it.

DM: Did you ever hear who flooded the dry dock? Who did that? Who acted on that? Some yard worker, or...

AF: I think our damage control officers did, aboard ship.

DM: Okay.

AF: It has to be for that water. Because they said they couldn't fire those guns as long as that ship was sitting on keel blocks.

DM: Yeah.

AF: So consequently they decided—what officer made the final decision, I imagine the captain more than anybody else, because he was the man that made the decisions on that.

DM: A lot of people talk about the tragedy of there. Was there any funny stories or something funny that happened?

AF: Yeah, there's one thing that we had a guy that was, he was a phone talker on the five-inch twenty-fives. Those were those old guns. And when that bomb hit, it didn't hit his gun but it scared him. And he jumped off his gun and started running. He didn't know where he was running to but the only reason that kept him going in that dry dock was that phone around his neck and it took him right off his feet and laid him flat on his deck. By that time, he realized what he was doing, where he was going, so that was one of the funny things about it because you don't see too many—one of the things that comes to mind. We had a second class machinist mate on there and he was in the A Division and his name was Barr. No, I'm sorry. I've got this all mixed up with the day that we was torpedoed in Buckner Bay, [*Okinawa*].

DM: Okay.

AF: And that, and you probably don't want that in this interview right now anyway.

DM: Well, that's okay...

AF: But what I...

DM: ...but if we stay on Pearl Harbor.

AF: Yeah, but what I was going to say was he was in the after air compressor rooms on the ship.

DM: Uh-huh.

AF: And the ship, when it was flooded, it flooded them compartments back there where they couldn't get to him. He was down in there, but he was, it was dry, but he was trapped.

DM: Uh-huh.

AF: He spent I think it was about five or six days down there, trapped below that water line. Of course there was enough air down there just for him to breathe and he was the only man down there. And when he came out of

there, when they finally built coffer dams down there and pumped that water out and got him out of there, by the time that we had got back to the States, he had turned practically white-headed.

DM: No kidding.

AF: His hair had just—when you've heard this story that you can be scared so bad that your hair turns white, well I believe it. I believe that. And one thing about Barr, he would never go down below those decks. He slept in a tent on the quarterdeck of our ship all the way from Guam to Bremerton, [*Washington*], going back to Bremerton.

DM: And that's when you guys were torpedoed at the end of the war?

AF: That's when we was torpedoed in Buckner Bay.

DM: You know, so much has been written about the Pearl Harbor attack and you know, some of it accurate, some of it inaccurate. What do you think the lesson of Pearl Harbor was for our country?

AF: The one of the things that always comes to mind, as far as Pearl Harbor Survivor, as far as the attack on Pearl Harbor is concerned, was that why in the world didn't Short and Kimmel know what was going on? They had the—what'd they call it? —the purple machine or something to that effect. They had one of 'em in Washington and they had, when they sent the other one out to MacArthur.

DM: Right.

AF: But they blamed Kimmel and Short for that, for the vacillation that was formed, that happened in Pearl, but how in the world could those people know what was going on if they didn't have firsthand information?

DM: Do you think they were treated unfairly?

AF: Do I what?

DM: Do you think they were treated unfairly?

AF: I most certainly do. The Pearl Harbor Survivors' Association has been for years trying to get them reinstated to their official ranks.

DM: Right.

AF: And I don't know whether we'll ever be able to do it, but I don't think we'll ever stop trying.

DM: It recently went through a review.

AF: Yeah. And I'm going to say this, and I don't care whether it goes on tape or not, if there is one man in the military service that should've been court-martialed for that business that happened in the Philippine Islands, it was Douglas MacArthur. And I don't care if they hang me tomorrow for me saying it.

DM: Well, there is a sentiment among historians that you may be right on that point, that the same thing happened to him and he had ample warning.

AF: He had twenty-four hours warning.

DM: But if we look at military law, not to be argumentative, but to throw a point out so that you can—I'd like to have you to react to that. You know if a captain, he's in his cabin, his XO [*Executive Officer*] puts that ship on the rocks, he's going to go, because he's responsible. I'm just wondering while a lot of the survivors who have military knowledge, military men, how come that is not applied to Kimmel and Short?

(Conversation off-mike)

DM: Okay. Think about that.

(Conversation off-mike)

(Taping stops, then resumes)

DM: I better repeat the question to you. As you know, the example is if a captain, whether he's responsible or not, something goes wrong aboard ship, he's replaced. He's held responsible for that.

AF: That's right.

DM: Admiral Kimmel and General Short were the commanders at Hawaii. The attack happened and they were held accountable. How—does the same rule apply to them or not?

AF: Well, the thing of it is, if you have the knowledge that things are coming to a head and that you're stand a chance of being attacked, you know as well as I do that there was no way in the world that Washington would've thought for a minute that the Japanese was going to attack Hawaii. Everything was planned and everything, the bombers and everything else was taken to Clarke Field in the Philippine Islands. That's where they thought that the war would start, as far as United States was concerned.

DM: Do you think, and you have some knowledge and I'd really like to know about this, do you think that, did you think in 1941 that the Japanese were capable of such, of that kind of move over the ocean in 4,000 miles and hit us?

AF: No, no, we didn't. But no way. But the thing of it is you've got to take two things in consideration. The United States was in an isolationist mood.

DM: Right.

AF: They didn't want to have anything to do with the war that was going on in Europe. They didn't want to have anything to do with the war that was going on in China. They said that doesn't concern us whatsoever. So consequently this is the way they felt about it. And I've read books about what Yamamoto has said and I've got a library full of those things.

DM: Uh-huh.

AF: He said that to kick the United States is like kicking a sleeping tiger. But at the same time, with the mood that the American people was in, that they

didn't want anything to do with any kind of wars going on, if they killed enough men in the surprise attack, which they was famous for, that the United States would sue for peace. And then they would go on and do what they wanted to do. They'd take—because they had to have Borneo, because that's where the...

DM: Oil and rubber.

AF: ...the oil and rubber was. They had to have Burma. They had already had the rice bowl in China. Then they had all the metal that they could ever use in Manchuria. So...

DM: In essence what you're saying is the Japanese probably created—not created, but committed the greatest miscalculation in history.

AF: That's right. I agree with you. And I say this in all sincerity, I actually believe in my heart that if the Japanese would've left the American fleet alone in Honolulu and went on about their business, down in the East Indies, we would've never went to war with Japan. Not when we did.

DM: Not when we did. You know, you look back these fifty-seven years. Tomorrow will be the fifty-seventh anniversary. And now we have a national day of remembrance. You guys have fought for years to get that. It was signed a few years ago by the President, spawned by the Congress. When you guys are all gone, what do you want to be remembered for, the Pearl Harbor Survivors?

AF: I would like to be remembered that we did everything we possibly could do to alert the American people that they would never be caught with their skirts down like we did on December 7.

DM: So the legacy of the Pearl Harbor Survivors is your motto, isn't it?

AF: That's right.

DM: To keep America alert.

AF: Keep America alert.

DM: And to remember Pearl Harbor.

AF: Right. I agree with it wholeheartedly.

DM: You know, one of the things, did you—this reminds me—this is probably going to be my last question for you, unless you want to add something. When you were in the navy, you met guys from all over the country.

AF: Right.

DM: And they met you, a guy from Texas, a guy from California. Did it give you a sense of America? Did you think in those kind of lofty parts?

AF: You never give it any thought. They were shipmates. And you always figured that whatever you did for them, they'd do for you. And I really, I—say, you damn Yankee or something like that, but as far as him being a shipmate, he was a shipmate. I mean he would protect your skirts as much you protect his.

DM: There was an author that wrote about it, Steven Ambrose wrote about infantries been in Europe, that when you talked to someone, he says, “We weren't so much fighting a war for the U.S. as I was fighting the war to save my buddy.”

AF: Yeah, that's right. That's right.

DM: They thought in terms of more personal terms. And what you're telling me is when you're aboard ship, those guys who you work with is your world.

AF: You will fight with them aboard ship. But anytime that you're on the beach and it's another ship that gives any of your friends or any of your buddies a hard time, even though you was fighting with him aboard ship, you protected him.

DM: And what's the basis of that?

AF: Camaraderie. That's the best word I can think of, camaraderie.

DM: Well, is there anything that you want to say in closing our interview today?

AF: The only thing that I would like to say is that I hope that this country has the foresight to keep America alert to the problems that we have in this country and in this world today. And I think that if they do that, it's a heck of a lot of American people can lay down and sleep at night.

DM: Thank you very much.

AF: You're welcome. I enjoyed it.

DM: Thanks.

END OF INTERVIEW